No. 1.

GOVERNOR THE RIGHT HON. SIR H. B. E. FRERE, BART., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., to the RIGHT HON. SIR MICHAEL HICKS BEACH, BART. (Received March 21, 1879.)

SIR, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, February 12, 1879.

IN my Despatch of 24th January last I only partially answered your Despatch of the 18th of December.* I was, in fact, interrupted while writing by the intelligence of our disaster at the Head-Quarter Camp on the 22nd, and was obliged to close my unfinished Despatch to be in time for the Mail.

The very serious check which we received on the 22nd does not, however, seem to me to call for any modification in the opinions I had already ventured to lay before Her Majesty's Government; on the contrary, it seems to confirm most strongly the arguments I had already advanced in my Despatch of the 24th, to show that it was impossible, with any regard to the safety of these Colonies, to defer placing in the hands of the General Commanding Her Majesty's Forces the enforcement of the demands made on Cetywayo.

Deeply as, in common with every subject of Her Majesty, I deplore the disastrous check we have received, it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that it was, in all human probability, mainly due to disregard of the General's orders that so great a disaster occurred, whilst every circumstance accompanying or following the events of that day prove what an insecure position we occupied both here and in the Transvaal with such a neighbour along so many hundred miles of undefended frontier.

As a consequence of the crippling of Colonel Glyn's and Colonel Durnford's Columns, and the shock which has been given to the Colonial forces, European as well as native, the columns of Colonel Pearson and Colonel Wood have been obliged to suspend their advance and await reinforcements, which can only be looked for to the extent required from more distant parts of South Africa and from England. It has become painfully evident that the Zulu King has an army at his command which could almost any day unexpectedly invade Natal; and owing to the great extent of frontier, and utter helplessness of the undisciplined hordes of Natal natives to offer effectual resistance, the Zulus might march at will through the country, devasting and murdering, without a chance of being checked, as long as they abstained from attacking the entrenched posts of Her Majesty's troops, which are from 50 to 100 miles apart. The capital and all the principal towns are at this moment in "laager" prepared for attack; which, even if successfully resisted, would leave two thirds of them in ashes, and the country around utterly desolated. From every part of South Africa outside the Colony, where the native races predominate, come the same reports of uneasiness and of intended risings of the native races against the white man, whilst the majority of the Transvaal European population is in a state of avowed readiness to take any opportunity of shaking off the yoke of the English Government.

It may be said that these are only the stronger reasons why hostilities should not have been commenced with the Zulu King. But I submit that every circumstance which has lately occurred shows how impossible it was to defer hostilities for more than a few weeks at the utmost, possibly till the harvest now ripening was gathered, and till the Tugela was fordable.

The feeling which has just burst out, both among native tribes and in the Transvaal, was there already, and in the Transvaal at all events its expression could not have been deferred by any postponement of hostilities with the Zulus.

But what possible chance was there that Cetywayo himself would for any length of time have remained quiescent within his own borders?

He had not acknowledged officially, and in the usual form, the award of the disputed territory in his favour nor had he condescended even to discuss the terms of the High Commissioner's messages to him. Had Lord Chelmsford's large force been kept permanently on his frontier, he might possibly have refrained from action as long as this force remained. But its permanent retention was not, as Cetywayo knew, probable, and the removal of the force would assuredly have led to a renewal of the encroachments and the violations of territory which he had directed or acquiesced in during the preceding year and a half; the slightest accident might have led to a collision, taking us at disadvantage, and what he had the power to do in a Colony so little prepared for self-defence may be judged from what he has done since Her Majesty's troops crossed the border.

It seems to me vain, I had almost said criminal, to shut our eyes to the fact that there has grown up, by our sufferance, alongside this Colony, a very powerful military organisa-

* No 18 of [C.-2252.] of March 1879, and No. 17 of [C.-2222.] of Feb. 1879.

tion, directed by an irresponsible, bloodthirsty, and treacherous despot, and that as long as this organisation exists and is so directed it is impossible for peaceful subjects of Her Majesty to feel security of life or property within 50 miles of his border. The existence of this military organisation makes that of a peaceful English community in his neighbourhood impossible, and unless Cetywayo's power of murder and plunder be restrained, this Colony can only continue to exist as an armed camp.

Again, it may be said that before attempting to coerce Cetywayo, the presence of a larger force in the field should have been secured.

To this I can only answer that though a larger force might undoubtedly have lessened the chance of successful opposition, there was no reason whatever at the time to suppose that the force at our disposal was too small for the task attempted.

I will not dwell on what might have been the case had orders been obeyed, and had things happened otherwise than they did happen, I stand on the broad fact that I sought information in every possible quarter, and had, and have, no reason whatever to suppose that there was anything rash in the undertaking.

I know of no one who is supposed to know the Zulus, best whose advice had not been as fully heard as I could obtain it.

Of the three persons who, among unofficial as well as official authorities are supposed best to know the Zulus, their feelings and probable intentions, one expressed to me his own belief in the ultimate acceptance of the terms offered without fighting; another considered we had, in our military calculations, greatly over-estimated the Zulu power; and a third, who had perhaps better means of judging than anyone else, whilst agreeing that the Zulu power had been much overrated, was convinced that the Zulu people themselves would bring their tyrant to reason, and that after a single action or two the military system of the Zulus would collapse. It is a singular coincidence that this latter opinion was expressed to me on the 22nd, at the very time that our camp at Isandula was in possession of the Zulus.

Looking back on the past in the light of what has happened, I cannot think that the work was rashly undertaken.

But even if I could have hoped that further reinforcements could be expected within a reasonable time in answer to a call for them, there was no time to wait; no one who had carefully studied the events of the last two years, and knew the ways of these barbarians, could reasonably have expected the Zulus to remain quiet, and it was clear that even if they deferred action, there were elements of strife elsewhere which could not be evaded or delayed.

As I have said before, and in other communications, the die for peace or for war had been cast more than two years ago; it was a simple question whether we should steadily bring our differences to an issue on a clear and unmistakable demand for our right to live at peace with our neighbours, or whether we should await the convenience of the Zulu King, and be taken at disadvantage when he saw his opportunity.

It seems to me that this same principle of self-preservation and self-defence should be steadfastly adhered to in all our future proceedings. It may be quite possible to patch up a peace with this or that tribe, which shall for the time be more or less satisfactory to some of the interests in this or in a neighbouring Colony. But I submit that Her Majesty's Government should not permit peace to be made till Her Majesty's unquestioned supremacy has been established and recognized by all Zulu tribes who now acknowledge Cetywayo between this and the Portuguese territory around Delagoa Bay. This I firmly believe to be the only guarantee for peace, security, good government, and progressive civilization throughout Her Majesty's possessions and all neighbouring territories in South Africa; and, without such security, I feel assured that this Colony of Natal can never be a safe residence for peace-loving and civilized men of European descent.

I have, &c.
(Signed) H. B. E. FRERE,
Governor and High Commissioner.

The Right Hon. the Secretary of State
for the Colonies.

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RESPECTING THE

AFFAIRS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

(In continuation of [C.-2316] of May 1879.)

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